

Jesus - The Christ!

Text: Mat 3:13-17

Suggested Hymns:

43, 39, 221, 848, 232

- 1) Jesus makes this claim for Himself
- 2) The Father and the Holy Spirit substantiate His claim
- 3) Do we know Him as the Christ?
- 4) Let us bear witness of Him to others
- 5) The witness of a Christian's Life

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 3:13-17, ¹³ *Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.* ¹⁴ *And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"* ¹⁵ *But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."* *Then he allowed Him.* ¹⁶ *When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.* ¹⁷ *And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

On January 6th was the day of Epiphany. It is a festival which has been celebrated by the Christian Church for many centuries. Epiphany means appearance, manifestation, revelation.

The Scripture lessons during the Epiphany season, therefore, deal with incidents in which Jesus of Nazareth appears or reveals Himself as the Christ, the promised Messiah. Because of that emphasis, we can readily see why the church has also stressed the obligation resting upon the Christians to bear witness to others of the Christ.

Anyone who has been led by the Spirit of God to see Jesus as his Saviour, as the Christ, will want to do what we commonly call mission work. In essence this is the preaching and the teaching of the Gospel of Jesus — the Christ, the

Messiah, the Saviour, the eternal Son of God come into this world at Christmas so that He might live and die in our stead and for our sakes.

The text before us, dealing with the baptism of Jesus, was made the subject of sermons on Epiphany already before the close of the second century. Later the Western Church used this text on the Sunday after New Year and substituted the story of the coming of the Wise Men for the day of Epiphany.

Let us therefore consider the Epiphany topic, Jesus, The Christ! May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Jesus Makes This Claim for Himself

In accord with the direction and command of an angel of the Lord, Joseph had brought Mary and Jesus back to Nazareth from Egypt after the death of Herod. In fulfilment of the prophecy which foretold that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene, Jesus spent the years of His childhood and youth and early manhood in Nazareth.

Except for the one incident when as a twelve-year-old boy He was taken to Jerusalem, nothing is recorded in the Scriptures of His years of growth in His Galilean home. They were years of comparative privacy and preparation for the public ministry to which He would devote Himself at His Father's appointed hour.

When that hour struck, Jesus, as the text tells us, *came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him*. The forerunner, John the Baptist, had been sent by God to prepare the way of the Christ, the Messiah. This he had been doing at the Jordan with his message of repentance and the baptism for the remission of sins.

Now Jesus presents Himself to John at the river and requests His baptism. John at once objects, *"I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"* Jesus' response is significant. He does not disclaim or disavow John's tribute or estimate of Himself. He does not confess personal sin and urge that upon John as the reason he should be willing to baptise Him. Rather He gives the order, *"Permit it to be so now,* and then in stating His reason claims to be the Christ long promised by God *for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."*

Here was the beginning of His public ministry. All of His life, of course, was a part of His redemptive work, including His conception, birth, and circumcision. But now He publicly claims to be the promised Christ, the divine Substitute who takes the place of each and every sinner, to live and to die in their stead. Here and now, as Luther puts it, *“He truly begins to be the Christ.”*

There is much one could say at this point concerning the wonderful, blessed twofold fact that our Saviour both lived and died for us. On our behalf and in our stead Jesus - the Christ both lived for each of us the sinless life we fail to live, *“fulfilling all righteousness”* for us, and then also, taking upon Himself our sins, He died for all of us, paying the penalty of death on Calvary that we might never really die.

However, the point to be stressed now is the simple yet profound truth that here at the Jordan Jesus by word and deed publicly made the claim that He was the Christ, the Messiah, who was to come and now was here.

2. The Father And The Holy Spirit Substantiate His Claim

John the Baptist recognised the authority of Jesus and in humble obedience to His directive baptised Him in the Jordan. Immediately after the baptism *Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.* ¹⁷ *And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

Although we stand in awe at this revelation of the Triune God and though there are infinite depths of mystery here which our little human minds cannot fathom, two things are clear. Jesus and John the Baptist, as the Evangelist John elsewhere testifies, see the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove upon this Man of Nazareth. This is the anointing of Jesus *“with the Holy Spirit and with power.”*¹ This is His formal and divine installation into His Messianic office. And so the Holy Spirit confirms with His presence the claim which Jesus had just made that He was the Christ of God and the Saviour of the world.

More than that, God the Father adds His substantiation and approval of the person and work of Jesus by His voice from the opened heavens: *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* This is the Father’s direct and personal testimony to the deity of Jesus of Nazareth, that He is in truth the eternal

Word made flesh. This is the Father's personal testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus. In other words, the Father says in effect, *"This Jesus is the Christ!"*

3. Do We Know Him As the Christ?

The question is neither irrelevant nor superfluous for members of a Christian congregation. Has there been a real epiphany of the Lord in our hearts and lives? Do we see Him by faith always and daily for what He really is, and what He really is to us? Does that faith constrain and control us as we go about our daily work? Let us pursue this vital question a bit further by dividing it into two thoughts.

Firstly, one concerns the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. If He is the Christ, whose coming was long foretold by the Old Testament prophets, and as He at the Jordan claimed to be, and as the Father and the Spirit revealed Him to be, then let it be more than mere lip service or vain recitation when we confess Him to be *"very God of very God"*!

If He is not the Christ, then He isn't even the great religious leader that much modern confused thinking would portray Him to be. Because of His own claims, Jesus is either the Christ, the Son of God, Deity incarnate, or He is an impostor or a misleading religious fanatic!

The record is there, plain and simple, for anyone and everyone to read. At His birth angels sang, and night was turned into day, and a star appeared to wise men in a distant Eastern country and men marvelled and worshiped.

Here at the Jordan the heavens opened, and God spoke. Then Jesus - the Christ Himself revealed His deity by restoring sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, strength to the lame, and even life to the dead. He changed water into wine. He spoke peace to the howling wind and raging sea, and there was a great calm. Men could not touch Him with their murderous hatred until His hour had come to give Himself into death, even the death on the cross.

However, as the Easter dawn revealed so gloriously, not even death could hold Him, and He showed Himself alive to those who loved Him.

We Christians know all these facts very well. But does our great familiarity with them perhaps dull their impact upon us? Do we through the Word today

hear the Father saying, *“This is My beloved Son”*? Do we see Jesus as the Christ, the God-Man, the eternal Son of the eternal Father?

Let us pray to God daily for that vision of true faith so that we, too, may see His God-head, though it be veiled in human flesh and blood; that we may hail Him as the incarnate Deity, the Christ, the Lord of lords and King of kings!

Secondly, Do we know this Jesus as God Incarnate that He is our Saviour from sin? To acknowledge the fact of His deity is necessary and good, but it is not enough. The devil and his followers also acknowledge that, and tremble! If He is to be the Christ to us as He revealed Himself to be, we must first of all recognise our sin and guilt and then in humble penitence look to Him for pardon and forgiveness.

This is the heart of the Christmas message. This is the heart of the Epiphany message. This is the heart of the Lenten message. This is the heart of the whole Gospel message of a gracious God to sinful mankind! Jesus, the Christ! Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God, lived and died for you and me, that through faith in Him we might be saved both from the guilt, the punishment, and the power of our sin.

Have you learned to know Jesus as the Christ? Is He your Saviour and your Lord? Then thank God for this epiphany of Christ in your heart and life, and demonstrate the sincerity of your faith and gratitude by renewed devotion and consecration to Him and His kingdom.

4. Let Us Bear Witness of Him to Others

The sinner who has come to know Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God ceases to be a slave of sin and at the same time becomes the glad and grateful slave of the Lord who has set him free. His life becomes a daily sermon which has as its central theme the confession of the faith by which he lives, that Jesus is the Christ!

*“You shall be witnesses to Me”*² is His directive to each one of us who claims Him as Saviour and Lord. Are we following that directive? Are we obeying His command? Do others see Christ in us? Do they see that our lives are *“hidden with Christ in God”*?³

Do others who are both in the world and of the world take note of us that although we are in the world we are not of it, that we are different from them? Does our example draw them to the Lord Jesus, whom we have learned to know as the Christ? These are extremely practical questions, and the sincere and genuine Christian answers them with a life that is the day-by-day demonstration of his Christian faith.

5. The Witness of a Christian's Life

For one thing, a Christian's life is marked by complete obedience to God and the earnest desire to conform to a Christian standard of ethics and morals. Not only does he strive to live in accord with the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule, but he also goes beyond them and strives to be a "*little Christ*" to all those with whom he daily associates.

More important, and perhaps more striking and attractive to others in our day is that he lives according to a standard of values completely different from that which guides most people in our modern society. How he lives is much more important to him than how much of a living he makes! What he is, is more important, than what he has!

He seeks and enjoys the good things of life, but he possesses them rather than be possessed of them. He is keenly conscious of the fact that here "*we have no abiding city*," of the fact that anything and everything in this world is subject to change and decay, and therefore he sets his heart upon those treasures which are beyond the grave. He sets his heart on treasures which are abiding and eternal.

This gives direction and purpose to his life and makes him the envy of many people to whom life is but a meaningless and desperate combination of "*sound and fury, signifying nothing*." It even leads some to ask him the reason for the hope that is so obviously in him, and then he has the opportunity to speak of Jesus, the Christ, and perhaps bring another epiphany, to a lost soul, as he once was.

What a powerful force for good our whole church today would be if all its members realised and discharged their obligation to be personal witnesses of Christ to others! By the grace of God, we have the true faith, the knowledge, and

the ability to testify of Christ. Let us pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance to open our lips and speak of our Saviour to others.

Finally, the genuine Christian will use his church not only for his own and his family's spiritual welfare, but also as a mighty instrument through which he can reach out to all nations with the great, good news that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. Such a person contributes regularly, generously, and cheerfully, as his Lord has asked him to do!

Christian friends, are you that kind of follower of Jesus, the Christ? Pray God that you may be, so that at His last and great epiphany, when all people shall see Him in His divine glory and majesty, you may be among those who will welcome Him with gladness and hear His words of commendation and everlasting blessing, *'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Acts 10:37,38

² Acts 1:8

³ Colossians 3:3